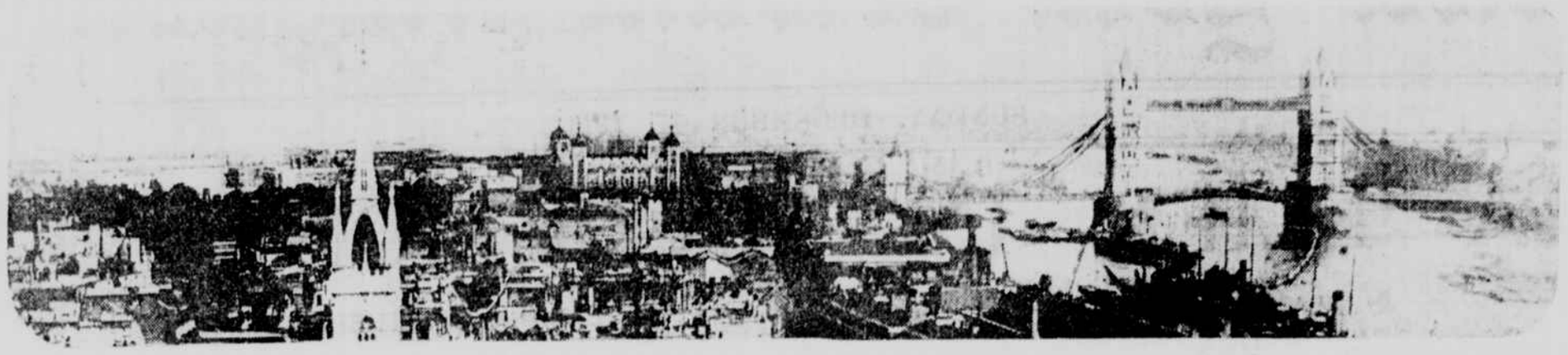
What I Hear in England



This is the second of a series of articles which deal intimately, and from first-hand observation, with the war-time problems and viewpoints of the English people. Mr. Hard's letters will appear regularly in the Tribune Magazine

By WILLIAM HARD

I HEARD some time ago that a certain highly important trade union leader was regarded as being, or as having been, a particularly determined opponent of compulsory military service. I at once went to see him, in order to get his views with regard to the prosecution of the war and with regard to the proper time for peace negotiations, and with regard, in general, to that element in British life which is commonly called the "Peace Party."

The Power of British Trade Unions

It should be understood, to begin with, that if the trade unions of Great Britain should demand peace negotiations to-morrow morning, it would be really quite difficult for the government to carry the war on with appropriate military and industrial vigor. I am more astonished every day at the power of British labor. When an employer here shakes his fist and tells you (as he sometimes does) that when the war is over he is going to "get after these trade union fellows and do them in," you think at first, being an American, that he means that he is going to try to smash their organizations and refuse to recognize them. In nine cases out of ten, however, you soon find, as he goes on talking, that all he means is that he is going to try to do his best or his worst to compel the unions to relax some of the amazingly stringent shop rules which, they have inflicted on him!

Again, so far as the government are concerned (the "are" is right) a British government is not a one-man thing; it is a Cabinet of men; it is not Mr. Asquith* and subordinates; it is Mr. Asquith and colleagues, all equally responsible to Parliament; it is a plural, both in British fact and in British grammar. So far, then, as the government are concerned, they not only have Arthur Henderson, from the Ironfounders, for a member of the Cabinet, and G. H. Roberts, from the printers, for a Junior Lord of the Treasury, but they also have a "Consultative Committee" of fifteen prominent labor leaders brought together by Mr. Henderson, and they have it in order that they may get the instant practical advice of a large number of practical trade unionists, officially recognized, with regard to governmental projects affecting trade union interests.

"Industrial Truce" When the War Is Over

After all, though, the best illustration of the power of British labor is in the conferences now going on between a representative group of employers called the "Employers' Parliamentary Committee" and a representative group of employes called the "Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress." These conferences have to do with the remarkable proposal for a sort of "industrial truce" to be established between labor and capital for a period of three years immediately following the final conclusion of the war. It seems not unthinkable just now that through these conferences—or through other similar ones—British labor and British capital may arrive at an understanding quite unprecedented in any country for mutual measures leading toward the diffusion of prosperity at home and the promotion of the export trade abroad. It would amount to a "combine" between labor and capital in this country for joint action in developing British manufacture and commerce harmoniously in Great Britain and aggressively throughout the world. And what will be the terms of this "combine"? I will mention two that are being discussed. I do not say that they will be adopted. But they are being discussed seriously at the conference in question.

The Eight-Hour Day for All Britain

One is a "compulsory forty-eight hours' week in every occupation." The eight-hour day for all employes in all Great Britain!

The other is "membership of a trade union to be compulsory on all workers." Trade unionism compulsory and universal either by treaty between labor and capital or by law!

In such a country the political opinions of a labor leader—a real labor leader—are genuinely important. The man I went to see, on the occasion to which I have referred, was Mr. W. A. Appleton, secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions. That means that he is the chief executive officer of the Federation and its customary spokesman.

And what did I find? I found, as I frequently have found, that I had gone to see a man who had been earnestly opposed, in principle, to the idea of conscription, but who was equally earnest in believing that the war should be fought all the way through to the absolute end. Mr. Appleton has two sons in the army at the front. He is proud that they went. They went of their own free will. Some five million other men in Great Britain and Ireland offered to go of their own free will before compulsory service was brought in. Compulsory service, he had been convinced, was unnecessary, and, further, for another reason, unwise. It would have been better, it would have been finer, it would have brought more of glory and more of moral strength to the British people to have won the war without surrendering the British principle of free will, as volunteers; and it could have been done, in his judgment. That was why he opposed compulsory service when the government suggested it. Well, the government enacted it. It was law. The management committee of the Federation of Trade Unions had refused to take part in calling a convention of trade unionists to protest against it. In this refusal it was supported by the Parliamentary committee of the Trades Union Congress and by the national executive committee of the Labor party. It seemed that a majority of the people of Great Britain wanted compulsory service. Well, with it, just as would have been the case without it, the war must go on to a finish. Messages had recently come from labor sources in Berlin, transmitted through neutral countries, suggesting a time and a place in a certain neutral country for an international conference, to which representatives of British labor and representatives of German labor were equally invited. But this was not the time for conferences between Germans and Britons in that way. The war must go on. It was a war against war and it must be conclusively successful.

Such, in its general purport, was Mr. Appleton's talk. It was not bitter. He did not rail against Germany or Germans. He had nothing good to say about war as a "test" of a nation or as a means of national "discipline." But the duty of Britons in the present actual practical circumstances seemed to him clear. And such is the talk of the great majority of labor leaders in Great Britain and of the great majority of rank and file members of trade unions. There are exceptions—exceptions which are numerous. That is, they are numerous if you are thinking about scores of thousands, or perhaps, at the most, of a few hundreds of thousands. They cease utterly to be numerous when you are thinking about the 2,750,000 trade unionists of the country.

Employers, Not Labor, Lacked Patriotic Fervor

The idea that British labor is "unpatriotic" is, I am convinced, pure delusion—delusion fostered in Great Britain and projected into neutral countries by the high-minded loquacity of a relatively small group of pacifists and by the low-minded abusiveness of a more considerable group of employers. As for the employers, I shall show in one of my letters that it is from among them and not at all from among the trade unionists that the worst instances of lack of patriotism in this war have arisen.

The Case of a Pacifist: "Help Me in Prayer"

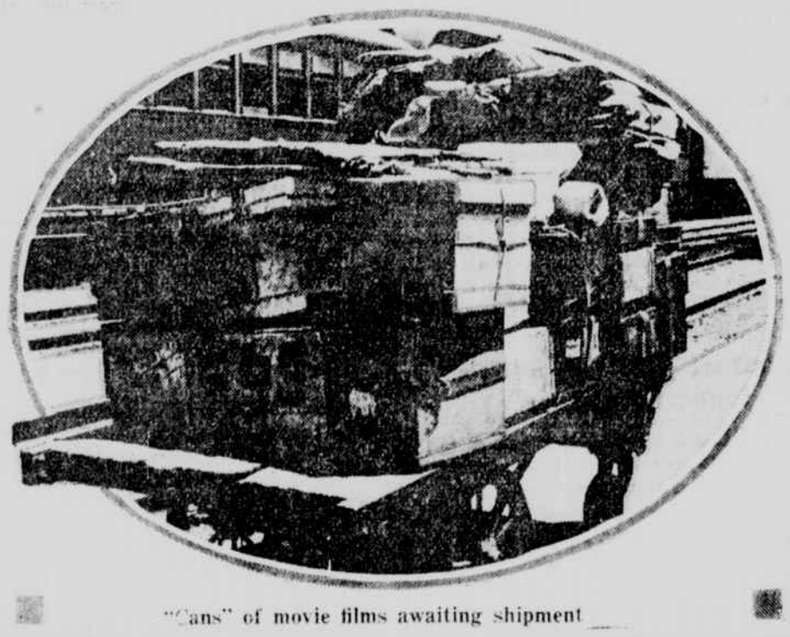
As for the pacifists, I do not wish to be taken as disparaging them. There is a conscientious objector here named Stephen Hobhouse. A government conducting a war cannot allow people to interfere with recruiting. Abraham Lincoln's government punished people for interfering with recruiting. This government does, too. It is inevitable. Nevertheless, in many cases, as in the case of Stephen Hobhouse, one feels the necessity of the punishment and at the same time the nobility of the prisoner. Stephen Hobhouse wrote a letter the other day, from which I take the following sentences: "Please remember that I do not want any kind of protest or agitation made over me or over any restriction put on me. . . . If anything seems hard, use it only to help me in prayer. . . . Prison seems curiously natural to me—as if I had been through it in some previous existence. . . . The sun is just creeping on to my wall, and on a bright day we get some hours of it, and by standing on my plank bed I get a lovely glimpse of the down, running up to Salisbury Plain. The spy-hole through the passage shows me a hedge of oak and hazel. We go out through the guard room to walk. The nights are long. . . . Well, I suppose this is the beginning of my monastic career. Prison has its own peculiar temptations, but by God's help it will be a ladder to perfection."

Times When the Word "Traitor" Doesn't Fit

It is idle to try to dismiss such a man by saying "traitor." But who is Stephen Hobhouse? He is a son of the Right Honorable Henry Hobhouse, barrister, author, member of the Athenæum Club, graduate of Eton and of Oxford, an Ecclesiastical Commissioner for England and Wales, a member of his Majesty's Privy Council. He is no ironfounder or printer or smelter or engine driver. Conscientious objectionableness is not to be classified as a genuinely labor phenomenon. It has its real roots, just as all pacifism has its real roots, distinctly elsewhere. I think this will prove itself clearly in my next letter, in which I shall describe the extraordinary developments now taking place among the representatives of the working class in the House of Commons.

*This article was written in London prior to the change in the Cabinet.

Middle Men of the Movies



"Cans" of movie films awaiting shipment

The film factory often turns out a million feet a week

(By Courtesy of "The Wells Fargo Messenger.")

Packing, and delivering the "cans" to the expressman

THE fan fascinated by the flicker of the film, in Bangor or Skowhegan, Me.; Three Forks, Mont., or Hudson Falls, N. Y., probably doesn't trouble himself much about the way the films got there. But almost as important as the studios where the reels are made are the details of how they are shipped and transported. The handling of the cans of movie films from the factories to the exchanges and thence to the local picture houses has become an important part of the express business. And next to the transportation of perishable food the movies offer the most delicate and difficult problems of shipment. The films are valuable and inflammable, and are on both accounts treated with especial care and caution. They are shipped in metal boxes or metal lined crates and are under the supervision of special express messengers. The movies, moreover, must always be rushed, as the programmes in many picture houses change daily and the news releases especially must be delivered before they are stale. Next to the camera men and the highly paid stars, the expressman is the most important person in the movie business.

Poetic Education and Slang

(By courtesy of *The New Republic*)

A TEACHER who was humble toward the poetry in his pupils' hearts might find a way to tell them what verbal poetry is, and all about the technique of its construction, without once opening a book or drawing them away for a moment from the fields of their own pleasure. For not only is the prevailing attitude of the senses poetic in childhood, but children are continually adopting and creating for their enjoyment poetic forms of speech. They surround themselves with an evolving paraphernalia of vivid and unnecessary expressions, by which they reinforce their joy in the strong flavor of life. It happens, however, that the finer discriminations of pleasure-quality which we call "taste," and "the sense of beauty," are not developed very early, and therefore this poetry of juvenile conversation is not usually exquisite, or even beautiful. It does not sound like the eloquent rendition of polite lyrics in a drawing-room. It sounds raw. It sounds like Shakespeare having a good time. And in a society which worships Shakespeare next only to God, there is no sin against propriety equal to that of introducing on one's own account some of Shakespeare's ways of having a good time. For this reason the rich fruitage of poetry that ripens continually in the playground of the young is never harvested, and the rank color and power of it rarely stains the pages of polite literature. Educators look down upon it as one of the things to be eradicated in preparing a child to take his place in a society whose principal ideal is elegance. But I think we may say without exaggeration that current slang contains more genuine and compelling poetry than current verse. And if there is one place in the world where children's appreciation of the motives which impel poets to use language as they do might appropriately begin, it is in this virile poetry of their own creation.

Just as we distinguished two ways of experiencing or perceiving things—the way of adjustment and the way of realization—so we can distinguish two ways of naming things. Things may be named with a practical name, which tells us what they are *for*, which classifies them for scientific or everyday purposes, or they may be named with a poetic name, which tells us what they *are*, what they feel like, which engenders in our sensibility a vivid awareness of their presence. An oriole, to take an extreme instance, may be called *icterus galbula*, or he may be called *fire-bird*. And wherever anything is to be identified with words a similar alternative arises. The words may indicate only a handy classification, or they may convey the taste of a quality in experience.

It is a custom for literary professors and professors of elegant virtue to tell their pupils that all slang is the result of indolence. We use a slang word, they say, merely because we are too lazy to think up the "correct" word. This casual and sweeping generalization is a result of indolence in these professors. A moment's studious examination of the subject-matter would show them that even among practical slang words the expressions which fill that hasty purpose of ignoring discriminations are exceedingly few, that fully half of the practical slang makes a new and valued discrimination in the child's environment, and that moreover more than half of all slang is not practical at all, but vigorously poetic in its intent, supplying a new creative word for a thing, or a quality, or a mood.

The words *bluff* and *crib* and *flunk*, for instance, are entirely practical. They are important items in the technique of school life. *Muff* and *hunch* are as ingeniously fitted into the mechanism of social life as any words. They are skilfully formed instruments.

Pussyfoot, on the other hand, is a verb of poetic quality. *Up-against-it* is more subtly so. *She's a gloom, he's a butter-fingers, a flannel-mouth, have a heart, start something, put your foot in it*—these expressions are all keenly poetic, and they are strong.